DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 562 RC 018 515

AUTHOR Gold, Veronica E.; And Others
TITLE Intervention Assistance Teams in Rural Ohio Schools.
PUB DATE 18 Mar 91
NOTE 14p.; In: Reaching Our Potential: Rural Education in the 90's. Conference Proceedings, Rural Education Symposium (Nashville, TN, March 17-20, 1991); see RC 018 473.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Failure; *Consultation Programs; *Early Intervention; Elementary Secondary Education; Program Development; Program Evaluation; *Referral; Rural Schools; *Special Education; Special Needs Students; *Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Intervention Assistance Teams; *Ohio

ABSTRACT

Intervention assistance teams (IATs) were implemented in selected Ohio rural schools to provide early intervention for students experiencing academic failure and provide consultation services for the referring teacher. This study surveyed 119 chairpersons of IATs from 53 randomly selected school districts representing urban, suburban, and rural schools (however, it is believed that responses primarily came from rural schools). Useable questionnaires were returned by 80 participants. The majority of respondents were elementary school principals. Almost all (93%) reported that team members were either appointed or volunteered. The most frequently cited reasons for establishing the IAT were administrative initiative and a concern about high referral rates to special education programs. The degree of parental involvement in the program appears limited in most cases. Regular classroom teachers made the majority of referrals to the IAT, averaging between five and seven referrals annually. The IATs were as likely to recommend referral to special education as often as they would recommend modification of teaching techniques or the classroom environment. Out of 188 recent cases cited by subjects, 90 were referred to special education. IAT chairpersons perceived some services as beneficial, but the majority did not view the IAT as meeting a broad range of pupil needs or as benefiting teachers' professional growth. Future studies should compare students referred by the IAT and students referred by others. Future studies should also explore the relationship between the training and background of IAT members and their recommendations for referred students. Recommendations for improvement of professional practices of IAT members are included. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED342562

NRSSC PRESENTATION
Presenter: Veronica E. Gold
Co-Presenter: Ellen Williams
Steven Russell
Day: March 18, 1991
Time: 2:45pm - 3:45pm

Intervention Assistance Teams in Rural Ohio Schools

RC018515

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Doris Helge
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Drs. Veronica Gold, Ellen U. Williams,
& Steven Russell, Associate Professors
Department of Special Education
Bowling Green State University

Intervention Assistance Teams in Rural Ohio Schools

Graden, Casey, and Bonstrom (1985) indicated that prereferral intervention systems were designed to provide consultative support to regular education in order to a) help these professionals develop and implement pedagogical skills required for meeting the needs of a diverse student population, b) reduce student referral for multi-factored assessment, and c) reduce inappropriate placement of students in special education programs. These goals are timely in view of the fact that in rural areas, 75 percent of students referred for multi-factored assessment are assessed and approximately 65 percent of referred students are placed in special education programs (Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Christenson (1983). Special education service delivery in rural areas is confounded further by the fact that 64 to 66 percent of schools have reported tremendous difficulty in recruiting and retaining special educators and support personnel, respectively (Helge, 1984). In general, it appears that the "demand" for special education services is growing in rural schools while these schools are challenged by a lack of certificated special education personnel.

Rural schools in Ohio have implemented the prereferral intervention system described by Graden, Casey, and Christenson (1985) to circumvent the "referral-to-replacement scenario" common in today's schools (Harrington & Gibson, 1986). The Intervention Assistance Team (IAT), designed by the Ohio State Department of Education in conjunction with selected Ohio Schools, consists of a group of teachers, support personnel, and administrators who provide suggestions or direct assistance to students and teachers (Intervention Assistance Teams, 1985).

Further, IATs have the potential to promote changes in the functions of support personnel. Increasingly, their primary responsibilities shift from serving students experiencing failure directly to serving teachers of these students (Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985). Yet the emphasis on consultation through the IAT may not contribute to the reduction of problems associated with special education service delivery. For example, most teachers expect referred students to be placed in special education programs (Ysseldyke, Pianta, Christenson, Wang, & Algozzine; 1983) while other teachers perceive consultation as minimally effective (Martens, Peterson, Will, & Cirone; 1986).

Although the goals of the IAT are admirable, in view of the fact that there may be resistance to the consultation model upon which the IAT is based; this study endeavored to investigate whether the IAT perceived itself as an alternative to special education and what effect the IAT had on rates of referral to special education.

RC 018515

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were selected from among the 615 public school districts in the state of Ohio. A stratified random sample was drawn based on the statistical procedure developed by the Academy for Contemporary Problems (1978) for use by the Ohio Department of Education's statistical information system. A total of 146 school districts representing urban, suburban, and rural schools and reflecting the population distribution in the state were randomly selected for inclusion in this study.

Superintendents of these districts were sent a letter to determine if they had an IAT and if they would be willing to have the chairperson of their IAT participate in this study. Fifty-three superintendents responded affirmatively to both questions. Despite efforts to obtain a stratified random sample, superintendents who declined to participate precluded achievement of that goal. It is probable that school districts of superintendents agreeing to participate in the study reflected primarily rural schools since research on the IAT by Phillips and Hannah (1991; see notes) suggested that 74 percent of urban schools in Ohio had no organized teams. However, the proportion of schools in each category is unknown.

Since superintendents indicated that there were multiple schools within their systems that maintained the IAT, 119 IAT chairpersons (subjects) were sent a survey. Eighty-three (70%) of the 119 eligible subjects responded. Three of the responses were not analyzed because the respondents indicated that the functions of their team did not include early intervention to students experiencing academic failure or consultation with referring teachers. For example, one respondent indicated that the purpose of the team was to reduce drug usage among students. Following the disqualification of responses from three subjects, a total of 80 (67%) of the subjects' responses were analyzed.

Instrumentation

Subjects were asked to respond to 29 questions; four of which required a yes/no response, 17 of which required selection of a response from a multiple choice format, six of which used a three or four point rating scale, and two questions which required short written responses. Items in the survey related to the type of school and its community setting, composition and function of the IAT, communication with parents, sources of and reasons for referral, and benefits to professional staff and students. Finally, subjects were asked to indicate the IAT recommendations for the three most recent referrals processed prior to receiving the survey.

Results

Mean, frequency and percentage were calculated for each multiple choice or rating scale response. When calculating percentage, all values were rounded to the nearest whole. Seventy-one percent (n=57) of the schools sponsoring the IAT were classified as elementary schools and 69 percent of these teams were chaired by school principals. Thus, it appeared that the majority of subjects responding to the survey were elementary school principals. Three subjects classified their schools as middle schools, five subjects indicated their schools were junior or senior high schools, and 10 classified their schools as other or not fitting the definition of an elementary, middle, junior, or senior high school. Following principals, subjects reported that school counselors (9%, n=7), school psychologists (8%, n=6), or assistant principals (6%, n=5) chaired IAT meetings. Pupil personnel directors, LD teachers, elementary teachers, special services coordinators or intervention coordinators each were reported to chair IAT meetings in one percent of the responses.

Most subjects reported the following IAT member composition: regular classroom teachers (95%, n=76), principals (88%, n=70), school psychologists (74%, n=59), guidance counselors (73%, n=58), and special education teachers (55%, n=44). Nearly all (93%, n=73) of the subjects indicated that team members were either appointed or had volunteered. The most frequently reported reasons for establishing the IAT were administrative initiative (73%, n=58) and high referral rates to special education programs (51%, n=41). Other reasons cited for establishing the IAT were teacher request, low pupil achievement, mainstreaming concerns, teacher complaints,and high retention rates.

Subjects were asked to indicate what percentage of parents were informed of their child's referral to the IAT. Forty-four percent of the subjects indicated that between 80 and 100 percent of parents were informed. However, 33 percent of subjects stated that 20 percent or fewer parents were informed of the referral. When asked about parent participation, sixty-two percent of subjects reported that fewer than 20 percent of parents were invited to share information or participate in the decision making process.

As indicated in Table 1, regular classroom teachers made the majority of the referrals to the IAT due to students' academic problems in reading (80%, n=62) or multiple subject areas (76%, n=58). Regular classroom teachers referring students made between five and seven or more referrals annually. There was little variation among subjects regarding techniques used by the IAT to resolve referrals as indicated in Table 2. IAT teams were as likely to recommend referral to special education as often as they would recommend modification of teaching techniques or the classroom environment.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Participants were asked to identify the last three cases addressed by the IAT and what resolutions were offered. Out of 188 resolutions cited by subjects, 90 were recommendations for referral to special education.

The survey asked subjects to report whether or not certain benefits were evident in their school as a result of the IAT. Data in Table 3 indicates that 59 percent of the subjects perceived that it was evident that the team decreased the number of students inappropriately referred to special education.

Insert Table 3 about here

Sixty-two percent (n=48) of the participants reported that the IAT offered structured support and assistance to teachers in an attempt to create academic success for referred students. Concomitantly, subjects perceived that problems were tackled as a group and that the IAT increased communication among staff.

However, only one-third of the subjects reported that it was evident that the IAT met a broad range of pupil needs or served as a stimulus for teacher growth. Less than 20 percent of the subjects perceived that it was evident that the IAT helped teachers become more skillful in implementing instructional strategies or in feeling more successful in their teaching. Indeed, fewer than one-third of the subjects did perceive evidence of improved teacher confidence as indicated in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

In summary, it appears that IAT chairpersons perceive the team services as beneficial because of the group oriented solutions, the quality and variety of suggestions made to referring teachers, a reduction of inappropriate referrals to special education, and increased communication among staff. The majority of subjects did not perceive the IAT as meeting a broad range of pupil needs or of direct benefit relative to teachers' professional growth.

Discussion and Recommendations

IAT chairpersons perceived a decrease in the number of students inappropriately referred to special education. Further, these subjects reported that referral of a student to the team did not increase probability of referral for special education. However, almost half (48%) reported student referral for multifactored assessment as the IAT recommendation for the three most recent students referred to the team, and, as indicated in

Table 2, an IAT recommendation for special education was as probable as a recommendation to modify teaching technique or to confer with parents. While over half of the subjects reported a perception of reduced inappropriate referrals to special education, almost half of the real IAT recommendations reported were student referral to special education. In light of these discrepancies, it appears that there may be significant variance between the perceptions of IAT chairpersons and real recommendations made by the team. Data provided by subjects in this study support the hypothesis that the IAT may, in reality, function as a pre-screening committee for student referral to special education programs. Similarly, almost two-thirds of the subjects reported that the teams provided referring teachers with a variety of instructional strategies while, in practice, that particular type of referral resolution was made in approximately 40 percent of cases reviewed.

Interestingly, less than 30 percent of the subjects perceived the IAT as helping referring teachers become skilled in implementing instructional strategies or feeling successful in their teaching; yet, two-thirds of the subjects perceived that the instructional strategies suggested by the team did help referring teachers create more successful learning experiences for students. It appears that subjects, primarily elementary school principals, did not perceive a relationship between improved student performance and increased instructional skill of referring teachers. Since less than one-third of the subjects perceived that the IAT helped teachers increase in confidence, skill level, or feelings of success as perhaps IAT members view themselves as ill-equipped to respond to professional needs of teachers relative to their skill or confidence.

Data in Table 1 suggests that elementary school teachers refer five to seven or more students in their class each year. Assuming for a moment that each referral is for a different student in a class of 25 students, as many as 28 percent of the students may be referred to the IAT. A high rate of referral suggests that teachers may be using the IAT as a point of referral to special education since data from this study suggests that the IAT is as likely to make a recommendation for special education as it is any other recommendation.

In conclusion, subjects give the IAT "high marks" for its ability to support teachers, increase staff communication, offer viable instructional strategies, and reduce student referrals to special education. Subjects also report that the IAT is less successful in meeting a broad range of teachers' professional needs or increasing teachers' confidence and skill. Finally, a significant discrepancy appears to exist between perceived and actual resolution of student referrals to the IAT. In light of results of this study, the following suggestions related to research and professional practice are made.

Research Recommendations

1. A major goal of the IAT is to reduce the number of students referred and placed in special education yet, this study yields qualitative information which suggests that the IAT is the point of referral for special education. Since quantitative information is needed to confirm or reject this finding, future studies should compare the number of students referred by the IAT in contrast to those referred by other groups or individuals.

2. Both the training and function, respectively, of IAT members may affect the nature of resolutions suggested by the IAT. For example, professionals trained to assess students and whose role in the school system is child study may frequently recommend educational assessment of referred students. Consequently, future studies should explore the relationship between these variables and IAT recommendations for referred students.

Professional Practice Recommendations

1. Subjects suggest that IAT instructional recommendations may not improve confidence or professional practice of teachers. In an attempt to remedy this problem, perhaps IAT members should provide in-class assistance and work to help teachers generalize newly acquired skills.

2. IAT members should discuss and define the role parents may assume relative to IAT recommendations.

3. Data suggests that some IAT teams and teachers use the IAT as a vehicle to refer students to special education rather than as a professional resource. Since the focus of the IAT is on how to teach students rather than on how to categorize them, the IAT should consider eliminating the option of making student referrals to special education.

4. To emphasize the importance of instruction and academic success of students, those in leadership roles should provide meaningful recognition for teachers who with the IAT, contribute to academic success of "at risk" students.

5. Since one of the goals of the IAT is to reduce the number of students referred to or placed annually in special education, it should keep peers apprised of the number of students referred to or placed in special education and how referral and placement rates compare with those of previous years.

6. To make it possible for the IAT to expand or successfully implement recommendations it makes, individual team members should have knowledge skills or experience in working with students with learning or behavior problems or "at risk" students.

7. While the IAT is derived from consultant and itinerant teacher service delivery models for the purpose of reducing referrals to special education, another strategy which may also accomplish the same goal is to employ dually certified, special education/regular education teachers to staff regular classes. Dually certified teachers have been better prepared for working with students with learning or behavior problems.

References

Academy For Contemporary Problems. (1978, Oct.). Academy sample: A Stratified Random Sample of Ohio School Districts Drawn For Use Within the Ohio Department of Education AEASIS Information System. (Available from author, 1501 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43201)

Algozzine, B., Ysseldyke, J. E., & Christenson, S. (1983). An analysis of the incidence of special class placement: The masses are burgeoning. The Journal of Special Education, 17(2), 141-147.

Graden, J. L., Casey, A., & Bonstrom, O. (1985). Implementing a prereferral system: Part II the data. Exceptional Children, 51(6), 487-496.

Harrington, R. G., & Gibson, E. (1986). Preassessment procedures for learning disabled children: Are they effective? Journal of Learning Disabilities, 19(9), 538-541.

Helge, D. (1984). The state of the art of rural special education. Exceptional Children, 50(4), 294-305.

Martens, B. K., Peterson, R. L., Witt, J. C., & Cirone, S. (1986). Teacher perceptions of school-based interventions. Exceptional Children, 53(3), 213-223.

Ysseldyke, J. E., Pianta, B., Christenson, S., Wang, J., & Algozzine, B. (1983). An analysis of preferral interventions. Psychology in the Schools, 20, 184-190.

Intervention Assistance Teams. (1985). Minimum Standards Leadership Series. (Available from the Ohio Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, 65 South Front Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

Notes

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Joy Rohn in the data collection and analysis and of Lisa Phillips and Ann Hannah for information on percentage of rural schools with IATs.

Table 1

Rank Order and Mean Response of Individuals Making the Majority of the Referrals to the IAT

	Response Choice					
	0	1	2	3	4	
Position	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	$\bar{x}$
Regular classroom teachers	1(1)	4(5)	12(15)	5(6)	57(72)	3.43
Administrative personnel	8(13)	19(31)	21(34)	7(12)	6(10)	1.74
Parents	14(26)	17(31)	13(24)	3(6)	8(15)	1.53
Guidance counselor	15(27)	16(29)	14(25)	5(9)	6(11)	1.48
Support staff	13(26)	24(47)	9(18)	2(4)	3(6)	1.18
Special education teacher	17(29)	23(40)	14(24)	0(0)	4(7)	1.16
School psychologist	24(46)	20(39)	7(14)	2(4)	4(8)	.98
Chapter 1 teachers	18(35)	20(39)	7(14)	4(8)	3(6)	.88
Other	4(67)	1(17)	1(17)	0(0)	0(0)	.04

Note. The following scale was used by participants: 0 = no referrals made per year, 1 = 1-2 referrals made per yea 2 = 3-4 referrals made per year, 3 = 5-6 referrals made per year, 4 = 7 or more referrals made per year.

Table 2

Rank Order of Techniques Used to Resolve Referrals to the IAT

Type of resolution	N	$\bar{x}$
Modification of teaching techniques	77	1.69
Parent conferences	74	1.70
Referral for special education	76	1.74
Modification of classroom environment	74	1.91
Behavior modification program	75	1.99

Note. Mean scores are based on the following four point numerical rating scale: 1 = frequently, 2 = sometimes, 3 = seldom, 4 = never.

Table 3

Benefits to the School from the IAT

	Response Choice			
	1	2	3	Total
Benefit	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	N (%)
Problems are tackled as a group	55 (71)	19 (25	3 (4)	77 (100)
Teachers receive structured support and assistance	48 (62)	21 (27)	9 (12)	78 (100)
Reduction of inappropriate referrals to special education	45 (59)	23 (30)	8 (11)	76 (100)
Increase communication among staff	43 (58)	27 (37)	4 (5)	74 (100)
Variety of instructional strategies made available	39 (52)	27 (36)	9 (12)	75 (100)
Meet broader range of pupil needs	26 (35)	33(45)	15 (20)	74 (100)
Serves as a stimulus for teacher growth	23 (32)	33 (45)	17 (23)	73 (100)

Note. Percentages based on the following three-point numerical rating scale were used: 1 = evident at this time, 2 = somewhat evident at this time, 3 = not evident at this time.

Table 4

Percentage and Frequency Values For How the IAT has Helped Teachers

	Response Choice			
	1	2	3	Total
Method of helping	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	N (%)
Increased access to support staff	36 (49)	30 (41)	8 (11)	74 (100)
More confident in resolving classroom problems	24 (33)	41 (55)	9 (12)	74 (100)
More confident in ability to meet pupil needs	22 (30)	42 (57)	10 (14)	74 (100)
More skillful in implementing instructional strategies	14 (19)	42 (58)	16 (22)	72 (100)
Feel more successful in their teaching	13 (17)	39 (53)	22 (30)	74 (100)

Note. The following three point numerical rating scale was used by participants to rate the methods listed above: 1 = evident, 2 = somewhat evident, 3 = not evident at this time.